Reviewer's report

Title: Enabling research in care homes: an evaluation of a national network of research ready care homes.

Version: 2 Date: 20 January 2014

Reviewer: Carmel Hughes

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Abstract: There may be word count restrictions, but it would be helpful to state how the evaluation of the impact of networks was carried out (briefly).

The results don’t seem to quite follow on from the method in that the former starts with a description of research which had already taken place in care homes, rather than starting with an assessment of the impact of the Network. It seems like two separate studies. Why was this mapping exercise carried out as it would not have had direct relevance to the impact of the network? Was it to act as a baseline? If so, I think this needs to be made clearer. I also think the conclusion in the abstract may need to be rewritten as it starts with a summary of phase 1, and doesn’t mention phase 2 at all.

Background

On line 2, the authors mention long-term care in the context of care homes and nursing homes. ‘Care homes’ is usually the umbrella term that is used to encompass both nursing and residential homes. This is clearer in some of the subsequent text.

Method

The first line of the first paragraph mentions the piloting of the ENRICH network in four regions of England, and this is repeated in the last line of this first paragraph.

The second paragraph then describes the two phases of the project, and as I had commented in relation to Phase 1, this seems to be an exercise to establish a baseline. Therefore, the abstract needs to be restructured to reflect this. In the abstract, figures had been used to describe Phase 1 and 2. Here, in this part of the paper, the numbers are expressed as words. This needs to be consistent. Why did they restrict their search of studies to the last 12 months? And what were the actual dates?

On page 5, some of the paragraph starting ‘the review established the range….’ reads more like a compressed results section and does not seem to be appropriate for a Methods’ section. There should be a clear delineation of the process of collecting data for the baseline and interpretation of the data. How did they approach care homes staff who had already taken part in studies, and similarly, how did they recruit to focus groups?

In phase 2, there needs to be a clearer description of how the network was
established. How did they select the four pilot regions, and how did staff in these regions become engaged with the process? What were they expected to do? What were the incentives for care homes and staff to get involved? Data collection and evaluation needs to be described in greater detail e.g. what site documentation was reviewed? I also did not follow what was meant by (page 6) ‘different data sources to provide a descriptive account of the process of setting up ENRICH.’

Results

On page 7, comment is made about the 20 researchers responding to requests for more information. Who were these researchers—were they part of DENDRON, or a different group? It is difficult to follow the presentation of results in comparison to what was presented in the Methods. Another example page ‘Care home managers were recruited to the evaluation through the pilot sites’. So what does this mean? How many? What did you want them to do? And as with a previous section, there seems to be a blurring between one section and the next. Towards the end of page 9, there is a commentary about difficulty in recruiting to focus groups and a summary about phase 1. This strikes me as material better suited to a discussion.

The results in relation to Phase 2 are largely descriptive of the process of establishing the network. However, there are some details missing about numbers recruited to e.g. focus groups.

Discussion

As per other parts of this paper, this is not a conventional discussion section as it is more a commentary on the establishment of the network and problems/challenges encountered and overcome (where appropriate).

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'